

Lincolnshire's Carnegie Libraries

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(A transcription of a series of six short articles published in *Lincolnshire Past and Present* (Vols. 85-90, Autumn 2011 to Winter 2012/13) about Carnegie libraries in Lincolnshire, England.)

No.1 – Gainsborough



Andrew Carnegie, the Scottish American philanthropist, had an abiding interest in libraries. In his later years he provided the funds to establish nearly 3,000 public libraries throughout the English speaking world. The majority were built in the United States, but over 400 were in England and Wales including Lincolnshire. In England, any community was eligible as long as it could provide a suitable site and was willing to adopt the Public Libraries' Act.

In Gainsborough, a meeting was first held to discuss a free library in 1891. There were already a number of libraries at different clubs, but non-members of these only had access to about 300 books at the Mechanics' Institute Library in the Old Hall. A vote of ratepayers to set up a free library was eventually held and carried. In 1902 Councillor Joseph Barlow, Chairman of the Urban District Council, in wishing to commemorate the accession of Edward VII, wrote to Andrew Carnegie for assistance.

Carnegie offered £4,000 providing his usual conditions relating to the site and the Libraries' Act were met. Sir Hickman Bacon offered a site and James Marshall approached employers in the town to raise the money to purchase it. Marshall's own firm gave £200 and a promise to make up any shortfall.

The new library was opened in October 1905, was administered by the Urban District Council and initially held 1,800 books for lending with a further 80 on reference.

The building is still in use as a public library and stands opposite Gainsborough Old Hall. Although the exterior of the building has memorials to prominent people associated with the town over the centuries, there is no acknowledgement of Andrew Carnegie. He merely provided the money! Over the entrance are simply the words 'Public Library'.

No.2 – Grantham



Grantham was rather late among Lincolnshire communities in applying for a grant for a Carnegie library. Rather than apply for funds directly to Andrew Carnegie through his forceful private secretary, James Bertram, they therefore had to deal with the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, which was set up in 1913.

A metal plaque, which used to be inside in the entranceway and is now mounted on the outside of the Grantham building, acknowledges that:

‘This building was provided by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust and the Corporation of Grantham. Opened on the 6th day of May 1926 by Sir Charles C.E. Welby, Bart. C.B.....’

The remainder of the plaque is made up of the usual list of small town dignitaries.

The long campaign to secure a public library in Grantham, dating back to the 1890s, was led by Henry Preston, a very active member of successive

Library and Museum Committees. In 1893 the Council sought to adopt the Public Libraries' Act and this required a referendum among local ratepayers. The result, however, was against having a town library. The majority being opposed to the extra 1d on the rates that this would have entailed! It was only after a second referendum in 1913 that this decision was overturned.

The public library has since moved to the rear of the Isaac Newton shopping centre, but the building in St. Peter's Hill has continued to house the town's museum collection. Regrettably, the museum was recently closed to the public due to budgetary constraints, although it is hoped that it will re-open in June 2012.

A library at nearby Great Gonerby also benefited from the generosity of Carnegie as in 1920/21 it had books supplied through a Carnegie UK Trust scheme based at Grantham.

No.3 – Lincoln



In general, the communities that applied for a grant to help fund a public library were those in which there was no free library. However, on occasions, an application was made in a place where a library already existed. Such was the case with Lincoln which secured the very large grant of £10,000-00.

The City had adopted the Public Libraries' Act and had established a library in the old Assembly Rooms over the Butter Market in Silver Street in 1894. By the following year the library had some 7,000 books as well as news and reading rooms. According to Thomas Kelly in his *History of Public Libraries in Great Britain 1845-1875*, this library had a very complicated process for borrowing a book. This included the need for the completion of guarantee forms, the purchase of catalogues and written requests for books.

In the early years of the 20th Century it was decided that a larger library with open access and a much simpler borrowing system was needed, so an application for funds was made to Andrew Carnegie.

The new library, which remains as the public library in Lincoln, was built in Free School Lane to a design by Sir Reginald Blomfield, who also designed the Usher Gallery. Pevsner records that it is of:

‘stone, one-storeyed, but with a two-storeyed dome centre. Wings with partly balustrade parapets and end pavilions, slightly advanced. Imposing and ashlar-faced.’

Dr. T.E. Page, a distinguished Lincoln classics scholar, opened the library. A large stone plaque in a meeting room adjacent to the Children’s Library reads:

‘This building owes its erection in 1913 to the munificence of Andrew Carnegie’

By 1922 the library had about 16,000 books and by 1937 this figure had risen to around 48,000.

No.4 – Boston



The previous three communities considered in this series, Gainsborough, Grantham and Lincoln, all received Carnegie grants that resulted in buildings either exclusively or primarily for the use of a library. However, this was not the case everywhere. Boston was granted funds by Andrew Carnegie that formed part of a much grander and more elaborate plan.

It had been originally intended to provide a Free Library and a School of Art to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. A public subscription fund was inaugurated that was soon accepted by Boston Corporation. The Corporation had also committed itself to providing new accommodation for the Council offices and for the Police and Fire services, so these were included in the scheme. The result was the opening of the new Municipal Buildings in West Street on 16 June 1904 which accommodated the Council Offices, Mayor's Parlour, Fire Station, Police Station, Police Court and Cells and School of Art, as well as the Library and Reading Room. The Library was given exclusive use of its own designated rooms. Andrew Carnegie donated £560-00 towards

the library scheme and the Mayor, Alderman Joseph Cooke, who officially opened the premises, contributed a further £500-00.

The imposing Edwardian premises are in, what Pevsner describes, as 'yellow and brown terracotta'. Parts of the original interior décor, including wide staircases and some wood panelling, survive. Over the years, the remorseless advance of bureaucracy and its attendant demand for more office space, together with changes in the authorities responsible, has meant that many of the services originally accommodated in the West Street building, such as the Police and Fire services, have moved elsewhere. Thus the Library is today housed in a building close to the north-east end of the parish church (the Stump).

No.5 – Stamford



The Carnegie library in Stamford is rather different from those considered previously. Each of these were housed in new structures, including that at Boston where the library accommodation was part of a building which included many more than just library services. Stamford, by contrast, had its Carnegie library in a building which had previously had other uses.

Stamford Corporation purchased the White Lion Inn in High Street in 1801. This was knocked down and a market and shambles by William Legg built on the site and opened in 1808. Legg's large Tuscan portico, which was originally open, was apparently influenced by Inigo Jones's design of St. Paul's Church, Covent Garden of 1631. A butter market was at the front with a fish market and some fifty-three stalls for butchers behind. The sides of the portico were eventually filled in and the building used for various other purposes.

After the Public Libraries' Act was adopted in 1903, the building was converted to a library, with a librarian's cottage behind, at a cost of £2,500-00 which was donated by Andrew Carnegie.

The new library was opened on 25 January 1906 by Earl Brownlow. The foundation stone outside quietly ignores the contribution of the man who made the library possible, although Carnegie himself, who had made his fortune in America as an ironmaster, would unlikely have been troubled by it. As a poor Scottish migrant boy in Pittsburg he had been befriended by a Colonel Anderson who had given him the use of his private library and had resolved that, if he ever had the funds, he would help provide libraries so that others could similarly benefit. To know that he had done this, whether in Stamford or elsewhere, would surely have been satisfaction enough.

No.6 – Scunthorpe



Two communities in what is now Scunthorpe received grants for public library buildings from Andrew Carnegie, although the one erected in the town centre is alone among the Lincolnshire Carnegie libraries considered in this series in that it no longer stands. The other library, the one shown in the photograph, was in Ashby.

The Public Libraries' Act was unanimously adopted in Ashby at a public meeting in February 1905 and the new library building opened in April 1906 in Ashby High Street. Andrew Carnegie donated £1,500-00 towards the cost and the architect was W.H. Buttrick. The first librarian was Clement Kendall, who remained in the post until his death in 1931.

The Ashby library building, which retains its original beautiful wooden staircase, stood empty and rather forlorn for some years but is now used as a fitness centre. The modern current library, which is more conveniently located further up the High Street, has in it a plaque taken out of the old building which acknowledges the importance of Carnegie's contribution.

In Scunthorpe itself there had been an earlier plan to build a Free Library and Council offices which had come to nothing, but, in August 1902, the Public Libraries' Act was adopted and a library building erected in the old Station Road (now known as High Street East) through Carnegie's generosity. The town surveyor, A.M. Cobban, produced the plans. The site, which, like the one in Ashby, was in a rather inconvenient position, was purchased through a gift from the Cliff brothers of the Frodingham Iron and Steel Company. The foundation stone was laid in August 1903 and the building was opened in February 1904 by Joseph Cliff. The first librarian was E. Davison. It was in this building, too, that Harold Dudley established the first Scunthorpe museum in 1909. The present central library was completed in July 1974 whilst the Carnegie building was unfortunately demolished in 1985.